United Nations

Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Reports of Italian aircraft disappearing while on humanitarian flight from Split to Sarajevo confirmed by United Nations spokesman; UNHCR suspends humanitarian flights in area until fate of plane can be determined.

+ Urgent humanitarian needs for more than 2.7 million people affected by the crisis in former Yugoslavia will be focus of international follow-up meeting tomorrow, 4 September, in Geneva.

+ Security Council "deeply concerned " at situation of humanitarian programme in Iraq; particularly disturbed about Iraq's failure to ensure United Nations staff.

+ Security Council calls on all parties in former Yugoslavia to cooperate fully with Committee set up following London Conference.

+ Secretary-General begins official visit in Moscow where he will meet with President Boris Yeltsin and other Russian officials.

+ International Atomic Energy Agency clarifies position on Iraq's nuclear programme.

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A United Nations spokesman this morning confirmed press reports that an Italian aircraft had disappeared from radar screens while on a humanitarian flight from Split to Sarajevo. Radar contact with the J-22 plane was lost at 1.15 p.m. local time at some 25 to 30 kilometres south of Sarajevo airport.

The plane, which was carrying about 1000 pounds of blankets, had a crew of four and no passengers. At the time of the incident, no military activity was reported in the area.

A search of the area was being carried out by German and British planes to try to locate the missing aircraft and survivors, if any. United States "Chinook" helicopters were also involved in the search effort. In addition,

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three United Nations armoured personnel carriers and two ambulances had also gone to the area.

It was later announced that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had suspended all humanitarian activity in the area until the fate of the missing plane could be determined.

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Humanitarian assistance for the 2.7 million people estimated to have been affected by the crisis in the former Yugoslavia will be discussed at a meeting in Geneva tomorrow (Friday) of representatives from more than 24 governments and international and non-governmental organisations.

It will be the second session of the Follow-up Committee, formed late in July at a meeting called by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). That meeting, convened to formulate a comprehensive humanitarian response to the ongoing conflict, endorsed a seven-point plan proposed by the High Commissioner, Sadako Ogata, who is chairman of the Follow-up Committee.

Tomorrow's meeting will review developments under that plan in recent weeks, receiving a report from the humanitarian assessment mission sent to the former Yugoslavia last month by UNHCR in collaboration with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. At the meeting, a new consolidated appeal for funds, based on the needs described in the report of that inter-agency mission, will be launched on behalf of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The appeal will be to meet the most urgent humanitarian requirements, details of which will be presented by Mrs Ogata.

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The Security Council last night expressed deep concern at the situation of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Programme in Iraq, including Iraq's failure to renew its Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations.

In a statement read out on behalf of the Council by its President, José Ayala Lasso (Ecuador), Council members said they were particularly disturbed by Iraq's continuing failure to ensure the safety of United Nations personnel and urged Iraq, "in the strongest possible terms", to cooperate with the United Nations.

The Council endorsed the Secretary-General's insistence upon appropriate field offices for United Nations agencies and programmes participating in humanitarian activities in Iraq and urged him to continue to use all resources at his disposal to help all those in need in that country.

The Memorandum of Understanding, which covers the United Nations humanitarian programme in Iraq, including the United Nations guards, was first signed in April 1991 and a subsequent Memorandum expired on 30 June 1992.

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The Council has earlier, in a statement of 17 July, expressed its concern at what it termed "the deteriorating conditions affecting the safety and well-being of United Nations personnel in Iraq.

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The Security Council has called on the parties concerned for their co-operation in efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the situation in the former Yugoslavia following the summit meeting in London last week.

In a statement last night, Council President José Ayala Lasso (Ecuador) said they fully supported the principles adopted and agreements reached at the London stage of the International Conference. Council members, he said, noted with satisfaction the establishment of a framework in which an overall settlement of the crisis might be achieved.

The Council welcomed the setting up of a steering committee to direct working groups in the preparation of the basis for a general settlement and related measures. The steering committee is under the overall direction of the two permanent co-chairmen of the conference -- Secetary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and British Prime Minister John Major who is current President of the Council of Ministers of the European Community.

Security Council members said they noted the commitments entered into by the parties and others concerned within the framework of the London Conference, and they stressed the importance of the full and rapid implementation of those commitments. They further noted the urgency of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and called on the parties for their full cooperation with the co-chairmen of the steering committee in achieving a comprehensive settlement.

The Council shared the Secretary-General's hope that the political will shown in London would be quickly transformed into concrete actions, so that an overall political settlement of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia in all its aspects "may be achieved through a continuous and uninterrupted effort". They noted with satisfaction that follow-up work to the London conference would begin this week, and would be pursued in continuous session at the United Nations Office in Geneva.

The Steering Committee held its first meeting today in Geneva co-chaired by Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali arrived today in Moscow to begin a four-day official visit to the Russian Federation, during which he will meet with President Boris Yeltsin and other Russian officials and receive an honorary degree from Moscow University.

The Secretary-General will leave Moscow for New York on Monday, 7 September.

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Maurizio Zifferero, the leader of the current International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection team in Iraq, today issued a clarification of recent news agency reports quoting him as saying that Iraq's nuclear programme "is at zero". According to the IAEA, the press reports were giving "a misleading impression" of Mr. Zifferero's understanding of the situation. He had not intended to issue a "clean bill of health" for Iraq in the nuclear sphere, the Agency said.

According to Mr. Zifferero's statement today, the IAEA inspectors had repeatedly visited Iraq's known nuclear-related sites. Buildings or specialized equipment which were not destroyed during the war and which the inspectors considered to be directly relevant to sensitive nuclear or especially to military nuclear activity had been destroyed on their instruction. However, the statement said, that did not exclude the posibility of further discoveries in the future.

The mapping of the Iraqi clandestine nuclear programme, which has involved fieldwork by 14 IAEA teams over many months, had been based on a compilation of intelligence information from various sources, Mr. Zifferero said, including satellites and detectors, supplied to the IAEA via the Special Commission set up by the Security Council regarding Iraqi disarmament. He pointed out that while no new knowledge had come to light recently, it was still too early to conclude that such would not be the case. In addition, he said, the Security Council had mandated the Agency in the nuclear sphere to conduct long-term surveillance in Iraq, which the Agency was planning to do.

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